

THE HARAPPAN SCRIPT

Of the writing systems of the ancient world which still await deciphering, the Indus script is surely the most important.

Although the issue is still debated, with scholars denying it any real linguistic value but rather considering it just a recording tool, the accurate cataloguing and study of the around 4000 samples of writing which survive to our days allowed the tentative decipherment of a few sequences of interlocking signs.

The Indus script has been shown to be logo-syllabic, and - yet with some discordant opinions - belonging to the Dravidian family. The core area of its development was the greater Indus Valley, in modern Pakistan and northwestern India, where the Harappan (or Indus) civilization flourished between ca. 2550-1900 BC. Remnants of this civilization have however been discovered as far south as Mumbai and as far north as the Himalayas, while on an east-west axis it extended from the Baluchistan's Arabian sea coast to beyond New Delhi.

The preponderant direction of writing was from right to left, with very rare attestations of boustrophedon ("the way the ox turn [in ploughing]" – that is, at the end of a first line to be read right to left, the following one should be read in the opposite direction).

The Indus script cannot be directly derived from any other known script. Its forerunners may be seen in the thousands of potter's marks of the Early Harappan period (ca. 3600-2600 BC), the majority of which are believed to be numerals. Although in the mature Indus script the lower numerals were still marked in the same way, resemblances between such simple linear signs cannot be given much weight, and the importance of early potter's marks has to be seen in the fact that they trained people in the use of incised (and painted) symbols.

The complexity of the Indus script can be seen in the following list of its signs, also showing their principal graphic variants (from A. Parpola, *Deciphering the Indus script*, Cambridge University Press 1994: fig. 5.1). (MdE)

LIST OF SIGNS

1	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	m	n	
	5018	H-73	K-49	M-1026	M-209	M-741	H-374	K-22	K-20	H-543	M-834	H-416	M-201	M-215	
o	p	q	r	s	t	2	3	a	b	c	d	e	f		
H-949	H-544	M-252	M-1092	9051	M-404	M-1126	O135	M-197	M-090	H-57	N-4	H-103			
g	h	i	4	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	
H-536	M-874	M-899	K-79	M-1091	H-38	M-80	M-1388	2497	M-795	H-499	H-643	M-1372	M-1270		
l	m	n	o	p	q	r	s	t	u	v	w	x	y	z	
H-132	1132	M-961	H-798	M-1626	H-299	M-379	M-1334	M-999	M-670	M-1363	L-102	L-221	M-1180	M-470	
aa	5	6	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	7	a	b		
H-228	M-238	M-142	M-831	M-488	M-1142	2826	M-1611	M-143	M-130	C-17	L-220				
c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	a	b	c	d	e	
H-76	M-144	M-1005	M-79	M-939	M-363	M-444	M-23	M-709	M-1400	M-1418	M-481	M-184	M-7		
9	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	m	n	
M-1653	K-18	M-667	M-1016	M-24	M-262	M-1098	M-708	M-8	M-796	H-959	M-631	8031	M-7		
o	p	10	a	b	c	d	11	a	b	12	13	a	b		
M-51	M-72	M-1198	3547	M-1054	H-347	M-35	M-875	M-802	K-16	B-1					
c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	14	a	b	15	a	b
M-295	M-1429	M-725	M-5	M-123	M-980	M-830	M-197	M-798	9851	M-669					
b	18	19	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	20	21	a			
B-17	K-60	M-1281	M-380	H-976	H-702	M-386	M-1596	H-584	H-477	M-1110					
b	c	22	a	b	c	23	a	b	c	24	25	a	b	26	
Ad-8	M-1578	H-212	L-221	M-103	M-71	K-9	1349	K-25	H-76						
c	27	a	b	c	d	e	f	28	29	30	31				
8501	M-153	M-15	M-1274	M-1639	M-699	L-12	M-704	M-991	H-951						
a	b	c	32	33	a	b	c	d	34	35	36				
M-262	M-353	M-234	H-160	M-71	M-837	M-879	3224	M-130	H-512						
b	37	38	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	39	a		
H-481	H-36	M-13	M-354	M-626	BIK-1	C-24	M-761	H-25	C-23	B-14	M-1316				
b	40	41	a	b	c	d	e	f	42	43	a	b			
C-23	M-161	M-67	M-701	L-26	H-346 B	H-247	H-481	M-335	1260	M-434					
44	45	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	48	a	b	c	d	e	
M-99	H-94	9606	M-1097	M-290	M-78	M-926	M-1283 + 1282	M-514	M-522	M-1341					
j	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	48	a	b	c	d	e		
M-1356	H-213	Krs-1	M-1319	L-233	M-120	9002	M-39	H-1005	M-398	M-1445	M-1444	M-1216			
49	50	a	b	c											
2528	M-380	2508	M-768	H-763	M-935	M-111	M-1350	H-22	H-180	M-1460	0736				















